

The Mismatch: The Council and Our Fate! The Wonks, the TransformUS and the Council

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Important changes are facing all of us as members of the University. TransformUS, in particular, has been the lightning rod for critical comment by colleagues not only in the pages of VOX but in other print media. Nor should it surprise us that the "Dickeson model" guiding TransformUS has been rejected by universities and colleges in both Canada and the United States because of the lasting damage it can cause. If history is of any value, a faculty member at University of Northern Colorado where Dickeson was president more than 25 years earlier has noted recently that his actions "still have not healed... created wounds of distrust and fear in faculty that have not gotten better over the years and they became part of the institutional culture... Maybe it's good for the bottom line but it can destroy a school."

Our colleagues have argued in VOX that it is unbecoming of an institution in the U15 club to gamble its strategic plans to a prescription that is arcane, flawed and ill-conceived. If we have a fiscal problem it is due to mishandling of priorities by the administration in the last decade. None of our programs is a luxury. They are all necessities for a distinctive U15 institution. The administration should show its leadership through creative resolve in examining options and execution of its mandate in collegial dialogue with the faculty who teach these programs.

This is the eighth issue of VOX to appear this year and we have reached our approved limit. As a forum for the expression of opinions of USFA members, however, we want you to know that should we receive more submissions we will approach the USFA Executive Committee with a request to sponsor further issues.

The Editors

Many of our students and also many faculty members are concerned about what is going on presently at our university, but many also feel that they do not know enough about the details and the background of the TransformUS process. Appended at the end of this article are several links to sources where you can find more information.

The TransformUS process has severely damaged the morale of students, as well as faculty and staff, on campus. The danger that many of them see is that the diversity of academic offerings, the number of programs, will be cut significantly. This means less service for ever higher tuition. It also means a shift away from education towards training (but that one can receive as well, and even better, at SIAST). Ultimately, this constitutes a shift away from the well educated, mature and alert citizen towards the well trained worker and willing consumer.

The administration tries to assure our students that they will be able to finish their program before it is phased out. Even if this is true, they will end up with a degree from a program that no longer exists, and therefore will have less value in the perception of future employers. In fact, the ways these programs are selected to be cut, the rankings in the Task-

Force reports, often downright discredit these programs.

While some tend to believe that administration will not cut a program until the last student has finished it, we cannot rely on this at all. We have seen examples of bold administrative intrusion into programs. Around three years ago, this brought down the smaller programs in the Languages Department. It happened that students one day, when they logged in to PAWS, suddenly found that they were no longer enrolled in their program simply because it did not exist any longer. There had been no prior warning or any sort of consultation with them.

This is not only about our students, the opportunities offered to them at our university, the safety of the programs they are currently in, and the value and reputation of the degrees they will earn. It is also about future students, those our current students had thought of recommending their program to, their younger friends or siblings. It is about future generations, possibly your own children and children's children, who once should also receive a top education from a university that will still be a university with its traditional values of culture, knowledge and academic freedom, and not a

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Walmart.

Many students have now signed the open letter to the President. Are they more willing to fight for the future of education and of this university than their professors? Will we dare to use academic freedom to speak up against the loss of the traditional values of our university and against the tuition hikes which now leave our students with huge debts at the end of their studies? If we fail to do so, professors will fail their responsibility for their students, for future generations and society, and tolerate the systematic destruction of the search for knowledge and truth at the University of Saskatchewan.

I encourage you to attend the next Council meetings on Thursday, February 27, March 20, and April 17 at 2:30pm in Room 241 Arts (Neatby-Timlin Theatre), and the next General Academic Assembly on April 9 at noon in Convocation Hall.

Links:

The VOX web page, where one can find several articles concerning TransformUS, as well as the open letter: <http://www.usaskfaculty.ca/category/vox/>

The official UofS web site about the "Academic Programs Transformation Task Force report" which also includes lots of blogs, together with some (for various reasons quite interesting) answers from the ruling "elite" of our university: <http://words.usask.ca/transformus/reports/aptreport/>

The independent "Free Academia at USask" blog site, where one can read the open letter and the list of signers, and read and engage in a lively discussion about TransformUS: <http://freeacademiausask.blogspot.ca/>

On this site are also lots of interesting links to articles in the media and on the internet that provide further background information about what is going on at the universities here and all over North America.

It is not too late to sign the open letter; signatures are still being collected and there is no dead line for feedback. One can sign the letter on the blog site, or write to the email address:

OpenLetterUSask@gmail.com

As the World is Watching Us Shrinking into Greatness Watch Us Shrink into Greatness

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In the early days of the academy students came together and identified scholars of their choosing to instruct them. These scholars included writers, philosophers, musicians, artists, and scientists who collectively formed a knowledge community. Many of their discoveries and works including essays, paintings, and compositions continue to enlighten us today.

How far we have come! We

now inhabit a reality where lamentably administrators have engaged a process called TransformUS to displace academic decision - making. This process puts primacy on the dollar generated per program rather than the program's academic merit. Make no mistake some administrative calculations in this regard have routinely been done. The difference is that now that central administration has eliminated 250 sup-

port staff positions, and they have convinced the faculty to do their job! This was a gargantuan task and my purpose is not to criticize those who volunteered their efforts. My purpose is to have you consider the outcome of the TransformUS process, which is the removal of academic decision - making at the College and department level regarding the programs you offer. The worth of academic pro-

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grams you teach has been quintiled in a reductionist process based on incomplete information and justified because of a “structural deficit” (a deficit projected to occur based on future choices), i.e. sketchy fiscal magical math.

The TransformUS process is clear in that it is a process intended for resource allocation. It means Programs will be eliminated in a “process determines outcome” manner. The process appears to be rule based but has been shown to be arbitrary and discretionary, not objective and transparent. Most clearly it is not a peer review process, and there has been no comparison of the peer “Systematic Program Review” process with the results of the current TransformUS process. The numbered rankings generated by TransformUS are poor numbers, devoid of validity, which are being applied to fundamentally used alter our governance and policy decisions.

The best process for academic decision - making remains that Deans, Department heads and faculty meet to decide how to make financial adjustments when resources are lean. If there is financial uncertainty then a best – case, worst - case scenario can be planned for and engaged. These individuals have direct knowledge of their discipline, talents and resources. The Transform US process removes decision making from the faculty, departments and deans who are best poised to make decisions about academic programs based on merit, rather than the primacy of a programs’ economic value to the University. The Dickeson methodology applied in the

TransformUS process more or less forces programs into quintiles even when they have same starting categorical ranking, by invoking arbitrariness.

A careful evaluation of the TransformUS “Academic Template” shows that a mere 26% of the template is based on “academic criteria.” The academic criteria are found in Criterion 5: Quality of the Inputs (degrees granted, research revenues, average number of publications) and Criterion 6: Quality of the Program Outcomes (accreditation, describe successes). The remainder or 74% is based on: Criterion 1: History; Criterion 2: External demand (such as applications per student admitted); Criterion 3: Internal demand (do non-majors enroll, are services provided to other units? what is the teaching load per faculty?); Criterion 7: Revenue and Resource generation; Criterion 8: Cost and Expenses Associated with the program; Criterion 9: Impact (alignment with Integrated Plans and Strategic Directions); and Criterion 10: Opportunity (for efficiency, for reconfiguration). “Demand” as defined by popularity of enrollment, is a far cry from “demand” as defined by societal needs. The very need to educate specialists makes it impossible to assess the value of their training programs by enrollment.

The TransformUS process refers to the Integrated Plans and Strategic Directions,

but fatally ignores our Mission (to achieve excellence in the scholarly activities of teaching, discovering, preserving, and applying knowledge) and Foundational Documents. The focus is

instead on “themes.” It has been my long - standing academic experience that excellence is not achieved by a dollar value per program calculation. The dollar value per program is a corporatist approach and is absolutely inappropriate for a University. In addition TransformUS is wrong-headed in that the U of S is largely comprised of professional programs and Colleges whose accreditation obligations leave very little room to align with the themes, and are therefore penalized for lack of fit.

To date the overwhelming majority of people directly involved in the Transform US process describe it as “deeply flawed.” Main criticisms include the Transform US process is: too fast, overly inward looking and ignores external factors, lacking in accurate information, inadequate in its consultations, particularly with students, and uses templates that are insufficiently flexible to capture the complexity of the programs and services on the forms. The TransformUS operational process forces programs into ranks rather than looking at those that did not meet acceptable academic standards.

I have repeatedly heard President Ilene Busch-Vishniac state “the rest of the world was watching” to see if they should take up this process. If the faculty accept the Transform US process which is a process of resource allocation, of a dollar value per program calculation through quintile rankings, and forced programmatic changes through resource allocations, it will set a precedent. The TransformUS methodology will be cloned and applied to other Universities putting

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“value for money” over “excellence” and “needed by society.”

What about the financial crisis? Ultimately crises and their resolutions are about choices. Fiscal responsibility anyone? Any public school board has much clearer and more transparent accounting than what is provided to the tax paying public from the U of S. For example the administration and Board of Governors has been profligate in deciding to approve building projects on campus: Canada’s largest science project, the CLS: VIDO - Intervac Biosecurity Level 3 facility, Expansion of the WCVM, Student residences, Health Sciences D and E wing, new Dairy Facility, and we are on deck with the Gordon Oakes Red Bear Center, a Children’s hospital, PET and isotope production facility, and a Hotel. The word “overleveraged” pops into my head. This building spree is

continuing in the face of a below cost of living increase by the Provincial Government! Does anyone in the public sphere actually have the figures for how much it costs the UoS to service their growing debt? Beyond the building debt consider the size and scope of the operating cost for the CLS and Intervac alone. Last estimates I heard from a VP Finance was the operating cost for the CLS was 25 million, Vido Intervac was 5 million. These facilities are costly to run. Where is the line item for those operating costs on the University’s Budget and Operating Forecast? Why is the lack of inclusion of this information defensible? It was clear in the business plans that the administration was aware these projects would run at a continual deficit when they were built. When the call comes out to cut support staff, retire professors, and cut programs it is pretty clear where the buck is being passed.

The majority of people indicate

the TransformUS process was flawed, and should not be used for resource allocations. That aside the Transform US information may inform the discussion on certain matters, but it should not displace a collegial process regarding academic program decisions. The best process for academic decision - making involves Deans, Department Heads, and Faculty. Accepting the outcome of the Transform US process to allocate resources means faculty support a ranking process of Programs based primarily on non-academic criteria. I am asking you to join me at University Council and in an open letter to the Board of Governors and President Ilene Busch -Vishniac in show of non-confidence in the TransformUS process as a means of academic resource allocation.

About VOX

VOX is a forum for the expression of opinions of members of the USFA on topics of general interest to the membership. Submissions to be considered for publication should be sent to the USFA office to the attention of the **VOX** Editorial Board or they may be sent by email to usfa@usaskfaculty.ca, or to any member of the Editorial Board.

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